



IS INTERNET NEUTRALITY A FORM OF INTERNET CENSORSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Internet neutrality is the theory that Internet service providers and governments should treat all data on the Internet same, without being selective or charging differentially by user, content, site, platform, application, type of attached equipment or mode of communication.

Internet censorship is to have power over what can be accessed, published, or viewed on the Internet. Blocking and filtering can be based on static blacklist or can be determined dynamically based on real-time inspection of the information being exchanged.

New net neutrality rules of USA are influencing Internet governance worldwide, and reshaping the debate over Internet regulations. While there's consent that the United States choice will have impacts on Internet freedom worldwide, there's sharp disagreement over whether the new rules will help or hurt. This paper analyzes various arguments for and against net neutrality and tries to find out "Is Internet Neutrality a form of Internet Censorship".

KEY WORDS: Internet Censorship, Internet Filtration, Internet Freedom, Internet Neutrality, Net Equality, Network Neutrality, Open Internet.

I. INTRODUCTION

Internet is thought to be born free, yet it is suppressed almost everywhere. Censorship is defined as the institution, system or practice of reading communication and deleting material considered sensitive or harmful [1]. Throughout history, different methods of suppression have been used to support specific religious and political agendas. Technology has often served as a major obstruction and catalyst for mandating censorship. The job of maintaining the status-quo through effective censorship policies is undergoing rapid change due to the development and diversity of different devices and networks.

Internet enables rapid generation and spread of information and ideas compared to previous technologies. The blend of the ability to rapidly generate and share new ideas together with the complexity of controlling information flow, creates a viral effect which can pose noteworthy risks to authoritarian regimes if the information contains subversive content which may influence the status quo or provoke collective action and free thought.

Even though censoring information on the Internet may be more difficult compared to other forms of media, several techniques have been developed and are in use in several countries such as China, Iran, and Syria.

An analysis of significant literature has exposed that the most widespread use or practice of Internet censorship is mostly conducted in dictatorial regimes, such as China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Tunisia [2]. These countries have engaged several new policies and technologies aimed at controlling access to information on the Internet.

In addition to governments, Internet Service Providers or ISPs, can choose what parts of the Internet people can access and what parts are blocked. No matter what method is used to surf the internet, internet access is at the effective discretion, if not mercy, of a provider that allows an account for service.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Internet censorship and content restrictions can be enacted through a number of different strategies. It may be carried out by governments or by private organizations at the will of government, regulators or on their own initiative. Individuals and organizations may take on self-censorship for moral, religious or business reasons, to conform to societal norms, due to intimidation or out of legal or other consequences.

In order to identify the content or category to be blocked, the blocker may use an IP address; port or protocol; domain name; URL; content signature, or keyword. These resources may be used to differentiate the exact content to be prohibited from appearing in a user's search engine results or web browser.

Furthermore, Internet censorship is carried out in numerous less-direct ways highlighted in recent news stories. These methods include, but are not limited to:

- **Restricting the speed** of the Internet to slow down the viewing and downloading of information and materials;
- **Raising the cost** of Internet access to levels that are unaffordable to the people.

Internet service providers control the pipeline that feeds devices and data connection. These Internet service providers positioned as a gatekeeper might be able to limit the speed of internet or increase the cost of internet access. If an Internet service provider decides to fluctuate internet speed or is able to charge different rates, will it have an effect on the openness and free information flow of Internet?



Fig. 1

III. PROPOSED WORK

The info graphic in Fig. 1 [3], prepared by WhoIsHostingThis, a hosting review business with a keen interest in Internet regulatory issues, maps the key verdict by Congress and the United States Federal Communication Commission or FCC over a period of decades.

This journey of decades has people, organizations, and point of view in favor of and against net neutrality. The objective of this paper is to analyze the arguments for and against net neutrality and to find out the relationship between net neutrality and Internet censorship.

IV. ANALYSIS

Way back in the year 2003, a media law professor from Columbia University in the United States, Tim Wu, initially wrote about the need for a common principle wherein all Internet Service Providers and governments view all data traffic on the internet in the same way without bias, and without differential charging based on content, user, platform, application, site, mode of communication or the type of equipment attached.

Ever since, the debate on whether the internet traffic should be absolutely free and accessible to all or whether the Internet Service Providers could charge a premium for providing faster speeds and better data access experience has been raging.

Proponents time and again see net neutrality as an important element of an open Internet, where policies such as equal treatment of data and open web standards allow those on the Internet to effortlessly communicate and carry out business without intervention from a third party [4]. A closed Internet refers to the opposite situation, in which recognized persons, corporations or governments support certain uses. A closed Internet may control access to necessary web standards, artificially degrade some services, or explicitly filter out content. Following are the opinion in favor of net neutrality

1. A user who is accustomed to the "fast lane" on the Internet would find the "slow lane" painful in comparison, because of the human psychological process of adaptation. When people get accustomed to something better, they would never want to go back to something inferior, significantly affecting a provider who is unable to pay for the "fast lane".
2. The right to demand a levy to assure quality or premium delivery would create a manipulative business model based on the Internet Service Providers position as gatekeepers [5]. Ensuring all people and websites one and the same access to each other, regardless of their ability to pay, prevents the need to pay for speech and the additional centralization of media power.

Before arriving on any conclusion, it's important to hear the other side of the story. The Internet Service Providers have been defending the premium pricing mechanism based on control of speed and service quality and putting forward an argument that they have spent billions to build the telecommunications network like state-of-the-art fibre optic cables. According to them, unless they can recover those costs through preferential pricing based on privileged levels of service, they will be unable to recover the gigantic investment made. In addition, they argue that if net neutrality is forced, then future investments in telecommunications infrastructure will be reduced, thereby impacting user experience. Following are the opinion against net neutrality

1. Prioritization of bandwidth is essential for future improvement of the Internet [6]. Net neutrality would make it more difficult for Internet Service Providers and other network operators to recover their investments in broadband networks [7]. The additional income from such services could be used to pay for the building of increased and improved broadband access to more consumers [8].
2. The larger threat to Internet freedom arises from giving the government the power or, more precisely, the government arrogating unto itself the power to decide whether private Internet providers are differentiating among users or content providers, or to compel Internet providers to carry content they may prefer not to send out. This fear is enhanced by the knowledge that net neutrality's "favoritism" prevention is inherently vague, and, therefore, the range of bureaucratic discretion is inherently large, if not boundless [9].

V. CONCLUSION

The Internet has unleashed innovation, enabled development, and motivated freedom more speedily and comprehensively than any other technological advance in human history. Its liberty is its power.

Without Net Neutrality, Internet Service Providers would be capable of blocking content and speech they don't like, disallow apps that compete with their own offerings, and prioritize web traffic (reserving the fastest loading speeds for the highest bidders and leaving everyone else with the slowest) [10].

Without Net Neutrality, Internet Service Providers will be capable of devising new plans to charge users more for right to use and services, making it difficult for us to communicate online – and easier for companies to suppress our speech

[11].

With Net Neutrality, government will be able to minutely supervise telecom services and control internet as net neutrality regulation inevitably involves government involvement.

In January 2014 a federal appeals court of United States nullified some key provisions of a 2010 Federal Communication Commission order on net neutrality rules. This judgment opened new ways for Internet Service Providers to throttle Peer-to-Peer data sharing, block file-sharing sites, and put into operation pay-to-play plans, which all go in opposition to the spirit of the net neutrality belief. However, in February 2015, new Federal Communication Commission rules on net neutrality established the basic rules of no blocking, no throttling, and no paid prioritization.

In March 2015, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India or TRAI made public an official consultation paper on Regulatory Framework for Over-The-Top (OTT) services, looking for remarks from the public. By 24 April 2015, over a million emails had been sent to TRAI insisting net neutrality [12] [13] [14] [15]. On 8th Feb 2016, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India debarred inequality of pricing in data services [16] [17].

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